



A woman with low vision shows off her checkered eye pin in Thailand.

low vision and the checkered eye symbol. She even produced a 30-second public service announcement on the Checkered Eye Project, which was aired by national broadcasters across Canada.

Then there is the blog Libby writes, as well as her postings to Facebook. Her speaking engagements at grade schools, high schools and organizations for the blind. Not to mention her visits to eye doctors, pharmacies and other community businesses in an effort to promote

awareness of the checkered eye and its meaning.

How is all this paid for? By Libby. The Checkered Eye Project is not a charity. It receives no donations. Apart from a small amount of revenue generated by sales of the checkered eye pins, Libby – with the help of her husband, Ray – finances the project on her own. “But,” she is quick to add, “I get a lot of help with website setup and poster and pamphlet design from some wonderful local people who support what I am trying to do.”

And the checkered eye symbol has taken off. Many local optometrists and drugstores now carry them. Grey Bruce Health Services supports the checkered eye symbol and a number of area Chambers of Commerce – as well as the Canada Chamber of Commerce – have published information on it.

Around the World

But it has gone well beyond Grey and Bruce Counties. People with low vision in multiple provinces across the country wear the checkered eye emblem. And with the help of the website, the symbol has gone international. It is now used in the United States, New Zealand, Switzerland and England. Then two years ago, the Low Vision Association of Thailand reached out to Libby. “Now the checkered eye identification pins are even available in Southeast Asia,” she says.

What gives Libby the greatest sense of accomplishment is hearing how the symbol is continually aiding those with low vision. “I get messages from people telling me how wearing a checkered eye pin or button has truly helped them feel more comfortable going about their daily activities, by alerting people they come in contact with that they have a visual issue.”

Then there is the lady from Texas who wrote to Libby about her partially blind five-year-old son. Libby immediately sent off some checkered eye patches that the woman was able to sew into her son’s clothing, so that his teachers and classmates would be mindful of his visual challenges. “Creating awareness of a person’s hidden needs can alleviate confusion, frustration and embarrassment, not only for people with low vision but for those with whom they interact,” says Libby.

But perhaps it is a gentleman from the U.S. who has been helped the most by the checkered eye emblem. An employee with a live theatre company, he emailed Libby to inform her that he was recently tearing down a set after a stage production when a beam of wood fell over and slammed into his chest – right against the checkered eye button he was wearing. He’s now convinced that not only does the symbol inform his fellow workers that he has

low vision, but it also prevented a cracked rib!

It has been 19 years since Libby started the Checkered Eye Project, but she’s still tirelessly working to raise awareness around low vision and those who deal with it on a daily basis. Recently she organized and hosted the Checkered Eye Ball, a night of music and dance aimed at increasing public understanding of the various types of blindness. Then this past June she supported the cause by attempting to pull a full size jet down a runway at the Toronto Pearson International Airport.

You read that right. Each year the organization known as Orbis – an international, non-profit group dedicated to saving sight – organizes a charity plane pull. Billed as the ultimate tug-of-war, teams of individuals collect donations for the fight against blindness – and then hook a rope to the nose of a 60-ton cargo plane and attempt to drag it down a tarmac. Normally the teams are 15 to 20 members strong, but Libby intended to go it alone, blogging her intended feat under the caption: Partially Sighted Grandmother to Single-handedly Pulls a Plane for Sight.

On the day of the event, Libby showed up in a checkered hat and skirt, ready to grapple solo with that plane. But a funny thing happened. “As I wandered about in my crazy outfit telling other participants about the Checkered Eye Project, they all wanted to show their support.”

So much so, that when it was her turn to walk out onto the runway for the plane pull, dozens of others went with her. “Suddenly I had a whole team behind me,” Libby says proudly. “Seeing that kind of generosity made me reflect on the story of the Checkered Eye: I started the project alone, but countless people are now fervent supporters.” And as it turned out, that impromptu Checkered Eye team was one of the only groups that day to actually move the plane!

Check for the Eye

So, after nineteen years does she ever plan on stepping away from the Checkered Eye Project. “No,” Libby tells me. “It is a passion for me, and I can’t see myself not doing it. I know what it’s like to live with low vision and the frustration and embarrassment it can sometimes cause. That’s why I keep working to increase public awareness of the impairment and the two options for self-identifying as a person living with it – the checkered eye and the white cane. In this way I hope to make it easier and more comfortable for people with low vision to be open about that aspect of their lives.”

For more information on the Checkered Eye Project go to www.checkeredeye.com. Then help raise awareness around low vision by sharing the website and its content with others. And when you are out and about, be aware of people wearing the low vision symbol – or, as Libby puts it, “always check for the checkered eye.”



Libby preparing to single-handedly pull a cargo jet on behalf of those with visual impairments.